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## ABSTRACT

Japanese Americans in suburban Orange County, California, are widely dispersed geographically and have frequent opportunities to integrate totally into mainstream society. Nevertheless, ethnicity survives and flourishes for many. The mechanisms by which ethnicity is developed and maintained by Japanese Americans residing in predominantly white, upper-middle class suburbs appear to differ in certain ways from the mechanisms operating on Japanese Americans living in more concentrated enclaves. Ethnicity is established in the suburbs through formal organizations which provide opportunities for formal and informal socializing with Japanese Americans from a wide geographic area. Three major kinds of ethnic institutions in Orange County--the Japanese American Buddhist and Christian churches, the Japanese American athletic leagues, and the Japanese American social and service clubs--function to provide a structured, protected, and acceptable setting in which to establish the more personally satisfying informal ethnic relationships.  
 (Author/RLV)

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Ethnicity in the Suburbs:

The Case of the Third Generation Japanese American

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The study of ethnicity has suffered from a long-standing confusion between the idea of being a member of an ethnic category - for instance being an American of Japanese ancestry, and being ethnic in the sense of sharing distinct behavior and belief patterns. Although being ethnic is often viewed as an ascribed status in the sense that one is born a member of the ethnic category, many studies that explore the loss of ethnicity implicitly acknowledge that this is not the case. For the research reported here on the persistence and maintenance of ethnicity among third-generation Japanese Americans it was useful to distinguish between ethnicity and ethnic category, and to define ethnicity as consisting of three factors: (1) the psychological identification of an individual in a plural society with a group of the same cultural origin of his own; (2) the recognition that the individual and the group he identifies with differ in meaningful ways from other groups of the same order in the society, and the acknowledgement that these differences ultimately stem from differences of cultural heritage; and (3) the use, both consciously and unconsciously, of elements of one's ethnic culture to identify oneself as a member of the group.

It is often assumed that ethnicity as has just been defined, flourishes only in the lower socioeconomic, ethnically homogeneous neighborhood, and as upward social and economic mobility moves individuals into the middle and upper-middle class suburbs, they lose their ethnicity. Two reasons are frequently cited for this loss: (1) integration into white neighborhood networks is desired, and (2) even if interaction with members of their own ethnic category is desired, opportunities for such in suburban areas with low ethnic residential concentrations are limited at best.

Japanese Americans in suburban Orange county, California are widely dispersed geographically. They live and interact mainly in a nonJapanese American environment, not infrequently being the only Asian family or one of only a few families in the neighborhood. Not only are there frequent opportunities to integrate totally into the mainstream society, but their abilities to do so are very high. Many are highly educated, are in the well paying prestigious professions, encounter little, if any, discrimination on the part of nonJapanese Americans, appear totally acculturated since they are now the third and fourth generations in America, and, being accustomed to living mainly with caucasians of the same high socioeconomic level, are used to, comfortable in, and able to deal with the dominant community. When contrasted to many of the Japanese American housewives in Los Angeles county, who reside in areas of a city where nearly their entire block is composed of other Japanese American families, Orange county women often have more nonJapanese American friends and socialize more often with them.

Given this situation in the middle and upper-middle class suburbs of Orange county one would expect that at least here ethnicity would be dying, if not already dead and forgotten. Certainly in terms of any advantage through ethnic identification in obtaining important material resources, the Japanese Americans here do not need it, for on their own they have been able to succeed and prosper. A number of the individuals studied here are self-employed dentists and doctors with thriving practices based on mainly nonAsian clienteles. And yet, ethnicity survives and flourishes for many Japanese Americans in these suburbs, although to become or remain ethnic involves some amount of effort in this nonJapanese American environment.

The ethnicity displayed here is not of the so-called "returning to one's roots" variety. Many have not been to Japan, have no overwhelming desire to

do so, and few interact or feel very comfortable with the Japanese nationals residing in the area. They are also not part of the move towards a somewhat more politically viable panAsian American identity that some of the more politically radical and activist Japanese Americans of Los Angeles are attempting to establish. The ethnicity to be found here is of a far more subtle but perhaps more deeply rooted and more natural sort. These middle class and upper-middle class Japanese Americans want to be with each other because they find comfort in doing so. They still share, or feel they share, a number of values, attitudes and behaviors with each other that distinguish themselves as Japanese Americans from the outside society. While integrating members of the outside community into certain spheres of their lives, they reserve much of the more meaningful parts of their lives for the Japanese American community. They have both caucasian and Japanese American friends, but their Japanese American friends are the more intimate and the ones to whom they automatically turn in times of trouble. Caucasians are friends, but Japanese Americans are part of an individual's ethnic "extended family."

While these suburbanites share with the Los Angeles Japanese Americans the desire to be with "their own kind," they necessarily differ in the ways in which their ethnic networks can be established and extended. Having far less of an opportunity, at least initially, to meet and interact informally with their fellow ethnics without institutional mediation, they must seek their potential friends through participation in formal organizations. These organizations not only serve to bring Japanese Americans in, but keep the pervasive white community out, thereby maintaining the ethnic environment desired by its members. Three major kinds of ethnic institutions in Orange county - the Japanese American Buddhist and Christian churches, the Japanese American athletic leagues, and the Japanese American social and service clubs - function effectively to provide a structured, protected and acceptable setting

in which to establish the more personally satisfying informal ethnic relationships. In addition, because memberships in these institutions often crosscut, complement and reinforce each other, Japanese Americans successfully extend and intensify their ethnic networks so that ultimately, even though they physically dwell in a white world, much of their personal lives is carried out in an exclusively Japanese American one.

#### THE ETHNIC CHURCH

The ethnic church has for many American ethnic groups served far more than its obvious religious functions - it has been an important vehicle for bringing fellow ethnics together, for focusing and intensifying their ethnic identification. It provides the facilities for, and sponsors, the activities that serve to establish and increase ethnic networks among its members. This is also the case with the Japanese Americans, be they members of a Buddhist church or a Christian one.

Many Japanese Americans attend an ethnic church for more than religious purposes. A church with a Japanese American congregation also provides its members with opportunities they might not otherwise have to meet and socialize with other Japanese Americans in a protected environment. Church activities are also an important means by which the children who attend schools in which there are very few Japanese Americans can socialize with Japanese American children of the same and, importantly, the opposite, sex.

There are a number of Japanese American churches in Orange county - both Christian and Buddhist - among which is Brookside Christian Church, which has a history going back to the beginning of the century. It is currently located in an area of Orange county that is mainly lower income and nonJapanese American in composition, and draws its congregants from communities all over Orange county.

The present congregation is predominantly young and American-born, but because the church also has a very tiny foreign-born congregation, like nearly every Japanese American church there are two ministers - a second-generation Japanese American for the English service and a Japanese national for the Japanese service. Efforts are made to integrate the Japanese congregation into many of the activities of the American congregation but generally, due to language and cultural differences, they remain separate.

Among the American congregation at Brookside there are two basic types of church goers - the social ethnic members and the ethnic Born Again Christians. Social ethnic members attend this church primarily so that they, and particularly their children, have an opportunity to interact with other Japanese Americans. Rather than attend their neighborhood Christian church whose congregation and minister are caucasian, they drive the 20-30 miles to attend Brookside, even though they may feel the neighborhood caucasian church provides a better religious education. Some of these parents attend religious services only sporadically but although not attending services regularly, they help out at, and attend, many of the nonreligious activities of the church. This serves to acquaint them with other Japanese Americans. Furthermore, as their children form friendships with other children in the church, and occasionally wish to socialize outside of the church setting, parents need to serve as chauffeurs. This again puts them in contact with other Japanese American families. Finally, due to the numerous family oriented activities of the church, many of the noninvolved ethnic members become more and more involved. From chauffeurs they become participants, and eventually some of them join the Born Again Christian group.

In addition to the various Sunday religious activities, Brookside sponsors an incredible number of weekly and monthly religious and nonreligious activities.

Every Friday evening there is Family Night. On Wednesdays there are bible study groups, and there is a Japanese language class one evening a week. There are also church picnics, beach parties, potluck dinners, skating parties, camping trips, rummage sales, square dances, carnivals, and the like, all of which give both the religious and nonreligious members a chance to socialize with and become friends with each other. The church also sponsors a number of boys' and girls' basketball and softball teams which belong to a Japanese American athletic league in Orange county and there are many activities geared specifically for the adolescents - dances, parties, athletic competitions, etc.

The structure of the church and the many activities it sponsors may be little different from those of any other active mainstream society church but what is significant for the maintenance of ethnicity in a nonethnic community is that it all takes place in an institutionally formed ethnic environment. One may be the only Japanese American family on the block, but through participation in a Japanese American church, one can choose to worship and socialize mainly with Japanese Americans.

This brings us to an important question - how is a Japanese American church kept Japanese American? Despite the antithesis to religious dogma, Brookside as well as most other Japanese American Christian churches have managed to successfully discourage nonJapanese Americans from joining. This is not done deliberately nor even consciously. Most caucasians most likely would not want to attend a Japanese American church on their own, for they probably would feel very uncomfortable at finding themselves in a minority position. There are a few caucasian members at Brookside, but the majority of them have a Japanese American connection - they are married to Japanese American members. There are occasional caucasian visitors and they are always greeted with cordiality by the church officials. But the majority of the congregation tend

to politely ignore the newcomer. The caucasian, unless he is particularly anxious to be with Japanese Americans, will leave feeling that the church is in some way not very friendly. There are a very small number of caucasians without any Japanese American connection who regularly attend services. One couple has served in churches in Japan and Hawaii so are very familiar with Japanese American ways and, as a result, are well accepted into the church. The others appear to be a familiar type to Japanese Americans - misfits in their own mainstream society who are attracted to another culture. Even though these few are fairly regular in attendance and even take part in church activities, it is interesting to note that they still continue to be set apart by the rest of the congregation. The pews they sit in are the last to be filled and will only be filled if there is nowhere else for the Japanese Americans to sit. People are less likely to spontaneously interact with them after services are over, and they do not appear to be part of any of the closer, informal networks that emerged from the church. In fact, after several months one couple quit going and the rest attend services only sporadically.

If, for some reason, a Japanese American church is unable to maintain its ethnic distinctiveness due to the influx of white members, what usually occurs is that rather than integrate, the original Japanese American members leave and no more enter to take their places. This, according to an informant who previously attended such a church, is what is happening to one such church in Los Angeles. Even in areas of Los Angeles of formerly heavy Japanese American concentration, the neighborhood Japanese American church remains ethnic in composition despite the shift in the area's ethnic composition. Its members, remaining loyal to their church, continue to commute from their new area of residence. Hence, a number of Japanese American churches survive even though

the neighborhood they remain in has become predominantly Black or Hispanic.

In addition to its social ethnic church goers, Brookside has a large core of ethnic Born Again Christians. Many of the members of this group are the leaders of the church. It is paradoxical that for this group, the more religious they become, philosophically the less ethnic they become, as their identities as Christians become of more significance in their lives than their identities as Japanese Americans. Yet, the more religious they become the more their social and religious networks and activities are conducted solely with other Japanese Americans. They become more involved in church activities and their family lives begin to revolve around the church - a Japanese American church with a Japanese American congregation and a Japanese American minister. They try to be practicing Christians, but they practice their religion mainly among other Japanese Americans. Along with an increased involvement with Japanese Americans due to the numerous church activities they take part in, they also have a deeper involvement with fellow Born Again Christian Japanese Americans. This is because along with ethnic ties, they now share a religious tie which binds them even more closely together. And as they become more involved in church related events, they have less time for their nonJapanese American friends.

Springing from the church are a number of different organizations and activities which serve to link a geographically wider and wider network of Japanese American Christians. This culminates once a year with a week long religious retreat, arranged by the Japanese Evangelical Missionary Society, at a religious camp called Mt. Hermon in northern California. Although drawing Japanese American Christians mainly from California, a number of people also come from ethnic churches in Washington and Utah. At the time of this research (1977-1978), approximately 1,500 people attended the retreat, the 29th Annual one.

Here, in the woods of northern California, with the exception of a few caucasian spouses, the camp employees and the key speaker, there were nothing but Japanese American Christians. As well as providing numerous opportunities to get to know other Japanese Americans, this retreat also served to intensify still further the ethnic-religious relationships formed at Brookside, for its members lived, ate, socialized and worshipped together for a week without the intrusion of the outside society. In addition to participating with the entire camp in all the formal activities of the retreat, the group from Brookside, coming prepared with a supply of food, frequently withdrew during the break in the morning service and after evening services to socialize and snack with each other in one of their rooms. These occasions, as well as providing further opportunities for socializing, also served as opportunities to share emotional religious feelings with each other. Sharing and crying together contributed to the intensification of identifying with Brookside which would thereby decrease the chances that these Christians would wish to seek Christianity in another church, much less a nonJapanese American church.

Especially for the adolescents, relationships formed in camp were often maintained through correspondence during the year. Since many families return yearly to Mt. Hermon, these relationships are renewed at each retreat. In this way an individual establishes and extends his ethnic network. This is particularly important for Japanese Americans because they find it difficult to interact with another Japanese American unless they have been introduced by a common acquaintance (Hosokawa 1973:214) or at least have a common friend.

#### THE ETHNIC ATHLETIC LEAGUES

A second institutional means by which Japanese Americans have an opportunity to meet and become friends with other Japanese Americans are the Japanese American children's athletic organizations. By limiting membership

to children of Japanese ancestry, the overt purpose of this type of organization is to provide the often times physically smaller Japanese American children with opportunities to compete successfully in athletic events. More importantly, however, participation in this athletic organization serves to increase the interactions of Japanese Americans with each other, both for the children themselves who are the players and for their parents who are the coaches, officers, spectators and chauffeurs.

Various Japanese American service clubs, business organizations and churches sponsor boys' and girls' basketball and softball teams that compete in age-graded leagues. Since children come into the organization as part of an already formed and sponsored team, they obviously already know enough Japanese Americans to form a team and to have a sponsor. Participation, therefore, tends to be a secondary rather than a primary means of establishing ethnic ties for the individual. In addition participation serves to intensify pre-existing ethnic relationships. Team members are drawn from a larger ethnic organization, such as Brookside Christian Church. The children, already knowing each other from church activities, are provided with further opportunities for interaction in a different setting as members of a smaller group. Such athletic organizations also act as unifiers for the extremely dispersed Orange county Japanese American community. Through the sponsoring of teams or donations to the league, diverse Japanese American organizations - religious, service, business, and social - can participate together in an event that is for Japanese Americans. It is a means by which the development of a sense of belonging to a larger community is encouraged.

These groups not only serve to increase interaction with Japanese Americans but also serve to further limit interaction with the outside nonethnic community of Orange county. By joining a Japanese American athletic club a

child has less contact with nonJapanese Americans than he would have had if he had joined a club such as Little League which is directed towards the entire community. When it is the basketball or softball season, much of a child's time is taken up with practice or with games which, as a result, limit the amount of time he has to spend with his nonJapanese American neighbors and school friends.

#### THE ETHNIC SOCIAL AND SERVICE CLUBS

The third way by which upper-middle class Japanese Americans form ethnic networks is through participation in the Japanese American social and service clubs that exist in Orange county. In form and function they mirror clubs found in the mainstream society. Many of them are in fact their exact counterparts, except Japanese American in membership. Rather than belong to the Optimists Club or the Veterans of Foreign Wars post that is in his city of residence, a Japanese American who seeks affiliation with other Japanese Americans will join a Japanese American Optimists Club, or a Japanese American VFW post, even if it is in another city. His reasons for joining the ethnic replica rather than the mainstream community club are similar to those of his ethnic bretheren who live in an ethnic enclave. The reasons vary from having a sense of comfort when dealing with fellow ethnics to being a good means of establishing business contacts. However, as a way of establishing and extending informal relationships with other Japanese Americans, membership in these organizations takes on more importance in this geographically scattered ethnic community than it would in an ethnic enclave.

Large scale ethnic community organizations such as the Japanese American church or the athletic league are open to a wider range of socio-economic backgrounds (although in Orange county there tends to be less of a range - from middle class small businessmen to upper-middle class professionals and

businessmen - than would be found in Los Angeles county) and, in fact, to a great extent there is a considerable amount of mingling among the levels. However, membership can be limited in the social clubs to a narrower range of social class, and this is the case, especially in the women's clubs. Here, not only does a woman meet and ultimately form friendships with other Japanese American women, but the friendships and resultant socializing are with Japanese Americans of the "proper" background - nonJapanese Americans and lower income Japanese Americans are excluded since membership is by invitation only.

The mechanisms by which ethnicity is developed and maintained by Japanese Americans residing in the predominantly white, upper-middle class suburbs appear to differ in certain ways from the mechanisms operating on Japanese Americans living in more concentrated enclaves. Ethnicity - affiliation, interaction and identification with other Japanese Americans - is predominantly established in the suburbs through formal organizations which provide opportunities for formal and informal socializing with Japanese Americans from a wide geographic area. This reliance on formal institutions contrasts with the informal and frequent contacts resulting from residential proximity by Japanese Americans in more ethnically concentrated areas.

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